What Shall I Do With This Sword?

Narrative, Speech and Politics in the Carnation Revolution

Introduction

This article explores the relation between political events and filmic and literary narratives by analysing the historical emplotment of the Carnation Revolution[1] in some Portuguese films and novels. With this relation, it invites us to return to the political origins of Jacques Rancière's *distribution of the sensible*, a concept first used in relation to the emergence of politics as *disagreement*[2], and take this frame to intensify the links between cultural history and political events. More specifically, my aim is to revisit the post-revolutionary work of several writers and filmmakers and assess the ways in which radicalism worked both politically and aesthetically in their works. I will argue that both forms of radicalism fed on each other: revolutionary transformation worked as a particularly challenging *raw material*, which many artists took as an opportunity to rise to the occasion and radically question the relation between narrative forms and their referent. The challenges posed by revolutions to narrative and representation, on the other hand, are a consequence of the particular discursive density at work in these historical events. In this sense, these works will give us the opportunity not only to revisit the historical role of narratives at the intersection of cultural and political history but also to reconsider the aesthetic value of militant art in the context of revolutionary political cultures.

1. The Gaze of Otelo

[1] The Carnation Revolution was a military coup in Portugal, on 25 April 1974, which overthrew a forty-eight year dictatorship and started a revolutionary period interrupted only on 25 November 1975, when a counter-coup took place.
[2] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*.

Towards the end of *Bom Povo Português* (Simões, 1981), a documentary film narrating the 1974-1975 revolutionary process (PREC)[3], a tracking shot condenses the outcome of the Revolution. The camera starts by zooming on a figure of a man in a political ceremony: the newly elected president, general Ramalho Eanes, one of the protagonists of the 25 November counter-coup that put an end to the revolutionary process, is invested in parliament, at the sound of the national anthem. As we see the commanders of the armed forces and the political leaders formally standing in the galleries, the camera slowly retreats, first revealing that what we had been seeing all along was in fact a television set, and then identifying a room where a man sits in an armchair, watching. The man is Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho.

Otelo was one of the young captains that led the revolutionary movement of 25 April 1974 and would later become one of the most iconic figures in the PREC, as the commander of COPCON, a special military unit known for backing up different forms of grassroots activism, in particular the occupation of land, factories and houses. The ceremony in parliament where a general becomes president surrounded by his fellow high-rank officers and politicians somehow signals the defeat of revolutionary activism. By staging Otelo posing to the camera while watching the ceremony on TV, director Rui Simões creates a strong metaphor where the captain himself becomes a synecdoche of the Revolution: his demotion – from historical protagonist to spectator of the historical event – can be seen as a more general displacement of politics from the street to parliament and from activism to spectatorship.

The scene's political meaning signals the close link between Rui Simões and what Otelo stood for. In the second half of the 1970s, he was close to a rather undefined and to a large extent inorganic "movement" of activists – with a strong presence of radical artists – gathered around Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho.[4] This explains why Otelo's figure gained such a strong symbolism in the film's

[3] PREC stands for Processo Revolucionário Em Curso, which could be translated as *ongoing revolutionary process*.

[4] Despite the marginalization of *Otelismo*, as it was informally known, the movement seemed to gain a strong political momentum after the presidential elections of 1976, when 16% of the electorate voted for Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho.

narrative and why *Otelismo* became almost an allegory of grassroots activism during the PREC. At the moment when parliamentary democracy was established with all its recognizable institutions – government, parliament – and actors – political parties and their leaders – there seemed to be no room for any forms of activism outside political parties and the other institutions of formal democracy. In other words, grassroots activism became a problem as it escaped the logic of the new political order, while *Otelismo* seemed for a brief moment the only way to frame those forms of activism in any kind of representation.

Such problem of representation was, in this sense, both political and aesthetical. Contrary to the formal procedures of political institutions, with its well-established events and protagonists, grassroots activism was continuous and involved multitudinous forms of participation (and this was exactly how the eighteen months of the PREC were perceived). Therefore, it could not be rigorously represented. There were simply too many people doing too many things simultaneously to encapsulate everything within a single narrative. The synecdochic role of Otelo thus had to perform negatively: in the scene of *Bom Povo Português*, the only reason why he could stand for all those who had been involved in forms of activism subverting institutional politics was because, with democratic "normalization", they too had already disappeared, relegated to the role of spectators.

But we should take the trope of *Otelismo* – the symbolic deployment of the figure of Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho – as a problem put to representation further, as what it represents goes beyond a question of quantity and intensity – of people and events – and affects the nature of politics itself. What is here at stake, in having potentially everyone involved in politics – or, conversely, in representing political defeat by suggesting everyone was watching politics on TV – seems close to the way Jacques Rancière defines politics as *disagreement*, a verification of equality by those who are not supposed to be involved in politics and who, as such, are not subsumable to representation.[5] So, it was not only

[5] In this sense, the *wrong* on which politics is based is what can never be crystallized in a name or "positive" representation: "The paradox of intellectual emancipation allows us to think the essential nexus of logos and wrong, the constitutive function of wrong in transforming egalitarian logic into political logic. Either equality has no effect on the social order or it has an effect in the specific form of wrong." Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 35.

because it was impossible to represent all forms of activism and everyone involved in the PREC that the filmic figure of Otelo became so crucial. His role also fulfilled the task of opposing the master narrative of institutional politics. *Otelismo*, in this sense, stood for both the unrepresentable crowd and for politics as *disagreement* materialized in grassroots activism.

This is what makes the choice of Otelo as a character in *Gestos & Fragmentos* (Seixas Santos, 1983), still another film reflecting upon the Revolution, so interesting to this discussion. *Gestos & Fragmentos* is a very rigorous exercise of montage interweaving the discourses of three men, as if transforming their monologues into a dialogue: philosopher Eduardo Lourenço, reading from his essay on the role of the armed forces in the PREC; North-American filmmaker Robert Kramer playing a reporter trying to find out who was responsible for the November 1975 counter-coup; and Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho giving a biographical interview. The film ends with footage from the Summer of 1974 of still another political ceremony: this time, it is Otelo himself that is invested as the commander of Lisbon's military region, a position from where he would later develop his support to grassroots forms of activism. General Silvério Marques gives a speech undermining the role of the young captains in the Revolution, and claiming for generals like himself a place in the resistance to the dictatorship and to the same youthful and revolutionary spirit pervading the new political situation. Otelo, facing TV cameras and other high-rank officers, replies with a tone that completely subverts the military hierarchy he was supposed to observe: "we, the young officers between twenty-five and forty-years old, were the ones who carried the immense burden of dethroning a regime that we all loathed but which our generals, despite their all-too-youthful spirit, did not have the courage to overthrow." (Seixas Santos, 1983).

A captain discrediting a general in a public ceremony encapsulates, again through Otelo, the emergence of forms of political dissensus in which people started *doing what they were not supposed to do and occupying places where they were not supposed to be* – to deploy, once again, Rancière theoretically terminology to describe PREC's grassroots activism. And yet, although this last scene retrospectively wraps the film's meaning up, it is not where the

Revolution's main *disagreement* is to be found. For, although the role of Otelo in *Gestos & Fragmentos* too is mostly negative, what he negates lies elsewhere, in the editing work interweaving the three discourses. More specifically, montage triggers a short-circuit between the reading of Eduardo Lourenço and the interview with Otelo: whereas the philosopher reads from his essay how incompatible the armed forces are with politics, Otelo very simply describes his military career as a gradual process of political consciousness. Otelo's life and the political participation of the armed forces in the events of the PREC thus prove the philosopher wrong, but what is here more decisive from our perspective is how the contradiction between the two discourses is demonstrated by Alberto Seixas Santos – another film director close to *Otelismo* – at the editing table.

What is at stake in these films is more than just a creative response to the problems raised by the narrative representation of multitudinous politics and political subversion. In order to evoke such an event in all its complexity, both films somehow had to incorporate that same complexity into their formal structure. This is explicitly done in *Bom Povo Português*, when Rui Simões establishes a parallel between the narrative of the film and the history of the PREC. After a speech by prime-minister Vasco Gonçalves to his soldiers in the Summer of 1975, urging them to carry on with the Revolution as 'the makers of our future', the voiceover intervenes in a long sequence describing several threats pending over the process and eventually declaring the closure of the narrative along with political defeat: 'This is the moment when the closure of the film is decided. The closure of this history, this movement' (Simões, 1981).

The sharp historical awareness Vasco Gonçalves – with Otelo sitting by his side – expects from his soldiers is, it could be argued, in the nature of revolutionary events as moments that push history forward. But this same awareness and the political activism it stems from is also what defines both the film's political message and, more decisively still, its political position as a narrative that participates in the history that simultaneously describes. In other words, it is that same awareness of history in revolutions what triggers narrative's self-reflection. In this sense, this was not a question exclusively faced by filmmakers,

but to everyone trying to represent the event, including writers, to whom we will now turn.

2. The Revolution as Literary Raw Material

In May 1975, when the PREC was reaching its climax, almost one hundred Portuguese writers met in a congress. Two questions traversed most interventions. First, how would the Revolution impact on literature? One of the first consequences of the coup was the celebration of freedom of speech and the dismantling of the censorial machine, while at the same time the events in the revolutionary process seemed to offer particularly good stuff for literary creation. And second, in what ways could writers take the opportunity *to rise to the occasion* and contribute themselves to historical transformation? However, the congress already seemed somewhat late. Filmmakers and musicians, for example, had mobilized right after April 1974 and from then on kept a constant activity filming events and singing at demonstrations. Granted, many writers meeting at the congress had opposed authoritarianism for decades and their novels and poetry could be seen as the core of the political imaginary that helped trigger the revolution in the first place. And yet, the speed of events seemed to prove incompatible with the rhythms of literary work and writers had trouble responding, as writers, and not merely as public intellectuals or activists.

The ability to think the discrepancy between writing and sudden political transformation was what made the speech given by writer Maria Velho da Costa one of the most theoretically intriguing contributions to the congress. Her text engaged with literature from a material, rather than ideological, or strictly aesthetic, point of view. Velho da Costa grounded the specific politics of literature in language, which she defined as the raw material writers had at their disposal in order to create meaning: "Nowadays I know and accept that the issue is between me and language."[6] 'Today' meant, of course, the PREC, as for Costa the political event had opened the space for a new language to thrive by both freeing speech and setting off all sorts of change. These circumstances were what allowed her to speak of the process of linguistic transformation (in "a language

[6] Costa, *Cravo*, 79.

that had gradually become plaintive, tamed, hushed, until a few months ago it began to howl and chirp"[7]) taking place during the revolution, as a historical phenomenon in its own right. In fact, more than the history of political subjects that were allowed to come forth and speak, the writer seemed to suggest that language itself could be used to encapsulate the revolutionary process as a movement going from oppression to emancipation.

Reading different things Velho da Costa wrote during the PREC – later assembled in the volume *Cravo* [Carnation] – gives us the picture of an ongoing reflection about the place of literature in historical events, and in particular of the ways in which language was used as a tool in the perpetuation of authoritarianism and inequality – "to write well, so the school tells us, is advantageous to any of those professions that will be chosen by those that can go on choosing"[8] – to become an instrument at the service of the new situation, when writers started to "quiver because the street broke into the houses and the poet ceased to be the sacred stone of hidden revolt". This was the key idea she had to share with her peers at the congress: every writer was responsible because "his arms [were] armed with words". Language was their specific tool. In a moment saturated with political mobilization, they had to rise to the occasion and "give form to the formless and uncontained chant that is pulsing through the country's speech-body". This would pave the way not only to a narrative of the revolution, but also, and more to the point, to a literary transformation that would allow language to "call forth the possible and the desirable (…)."[9] Again, the relation between language (and literature) and politics was twofold: a "name" had to be given to the "uncontained chant" already at work in the "country's spoken body" in order to enhance what could be imagined as "possible and desirable".[10]

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[7] Idem.
[8] Idem, 27.
[9] Idem, 84.
[10] Ana Paula Ferreira identifies a similar relation between language and the political process in her analysis of several post-revolutionary literary works (including *Cravo*). However, whereas she argues that women's writing 'cannot but erode the myth that language is in itself a medium of self-representation', in this article I chose to follow an alternative path by exploring the hypothesis that grassroots political discourse – particularly proletarian – may indeed come close to forms of *self-representation*, by becoming constitutive of moments of political and historical transformation. Cf. Ferreira, "Reengendering History", 237.

Interestingly, this dialectical tension within the PREC as both the raw material of literature and a historical form already immersed in discourse and narrative was taken onboard by several other writers already after the PREC, when the time was finally ripe for literature to produce its first works on the Revolution.

2.1 From Activism to Literature

One of the best responses to the challenge came with *Directa*, a novel of 1977 by Nuno Bragança, whose plot is located sometime in the final years of the dictatorship in which the author manages to correlate political activism with literary creation very effectively. Such correlation takes place in chapter 18, already towards both the end of the novel and the end of the twenty-four hour period of the plot.[11] Throughout the novel, a first-person narrator describes how during that day he had to cope with a family crisis (his wife had a nervous breakdown), his professional commitments and, on top of everything else, what takes most of his time and, in a certain sense, concerns, a dangerous political act, that of taking a comrade under police surveillance to the Spanish border.

The novel is an important work in Portuguese post-revolutionary literature, for several reasons. It is an act of memory and testimony, paying homage to antifascist resistance from the privileged position of the oppositionist (Bragança had been an activist in far-left political movements). But it is also a radical engagement with literary creation as a political act. Bragança's autobiographical account is here decisive. The novel ends in the morning when the narrator returns from the border to Lisbon by car. Activism, here, takes the very concrete form of driving a car after a political mission. At that moment – at dawn after being awake for twenty-four hours, or on chapter 18 in the book's narrative – the steering wheel of the Volkswagen becomes analogous, or correlate, to the pen that writes, as "the step of that step of the struggle".[12]

While driving, exhausted and slightly intoxicated, his mind daydreams. More than his wife's dramatic situation or the practical problems posed by this

[11] Thus the title *Directa* [Direct], the Portuguese expression for a twenty-four hour period without sleep.
[12] Bragança, *Directa*, 244.

nocturnal adventure, or even the anxiety of political clandestinity, it is history – more precisely, his historical situation – that emerges in the narrator's trance of fatigue and stress. He then reminisces the history of communism, relating what he defines as 'the spirit of October 1917' and the historical role of Trotsky and Lenine to Portugal's late colonial and late capitalist context, "stuck in Africa and in risk of being bogged down in the Europe of multinationals."[13] The sharp awareness of the broader historical context appears as a direct consequence of his political action, as the aim of his activism is to change the course of history. But past history and present politics are not enough to fully explain what is going on here, for the relation between the two could only be articulated through a third moment, that of writing the novel, in which the plot's temporality becomes irremediably disturbed. In other words, it is not just that the oneiric historical digressions of the man in the car are given to us in writing. The act of writing itself becomes part of the narrative as if already inscribed in the political act. This happens gradually, as he immerses himself in the silence of the road: "Volkswagen turning paper that turns and turns again into another Volkswagen".[14]

As the narrative shifts from the trip to Lisbon to the desk where he is writing the episode down, the correlation between the two has to be explicitly evoked. So, it was not only that his political situation could be connected to a broader history, as there was a further and more decisive connection between that same moment when the historical past was evoked while he was driving the car and the present of writing about it. This connection is what establishes the politics of both novel and clandestine activism in a common ground:

> Silence, then. For there was writing there, in a space-time that contained the seeds of another, of a literary kind. And all my movements were to control the fast motion of a car, whose faultless driving was the key to my remaining on the bridge of life, in full physical and mental integrity; and it was also the key to holding on – in flesh and bone and circulating blood – to this body which my writing, now looming, would later embody. Maybe – of this I'm still not completely sure, but – maybe putting into question or making impossible

[13] Idem, 255.
[14] Idem, 250

> the limits of the field where the usual suspects come into play: theory and practice.[15]

The narrator's effort to overlap historicity and literary narrative – almost to collapse the signifier and the signified –, the pains he goes for several pages in order to connect the two, deserves further exploration. For the philosophical reference to this collapse, that between theory and practice, not only takes us to the ideological corpus of Marxism, it also expands the realm of both politics and literature. In other words, we are obviously before an attempt to politicize the act of writing as a second episode in a political narrative. However, in a dialectical move that should also be understood in the context of Marxism as a critique of the distinction between theory and practice, it was not only that writing became political, but also that the political act of driving a car in a clandestine situation somehow gained a certain literary density:

> (…) I see myself as if I was there now. (…) In him who drove the car (a step in that step of the struggle), writing then *in the raw* what I now steer, in this handwritten journey throughout a Portugal *lit by moonlight and dreams*. (…) And so I search for you-us, working through these twin-spaces, one of which is the literary. The rolling Volkswagen still carries me, metallically, as the circumstantial instrument of a gesture in History that in the here-now (present tense) lives on in this weaving writing through which I delimiy a space-time thrust back into its essential mystery.[16]

To compare the risks inherent to clandestine work and writing a novel may seem counter-intuitive, a privilege that only the autobiographical status of the narrative allows for. It is, in any case, what explains the writer's struggle, his constant use of metaphor (*writing the wheel*, *driving the pen*) and syntactic wordplay (the "search for you-us", the "history here-now"), all the grammatical details that make the chapter so convoluted. And yet, Bragança also argues, as two parts of the same story, analogous moments in the same process, the passage from event to narrative should be smoother, not so much because steering wheel and pen are, as we have seen, both *steps of the same struggle*, but because

[15] Idem, 245.
[16] Idem, 244 (*in raw* is my emphasis).

Directa's chapter 18 was somehow already *in raw* in the historical episode that would later gain literary form.

Raw – 'em bruto' in the original Portuguese – is the key idea here. The circumstances in which history works as the referent to the literary episode proves particularly suitable to think about the ways in which reality already is a site of meaning, not so much because we can create meaningful narratives about it, but in the sense that it is already filled with elements later shared by literature. I am here thinking of Paul Ricoeur's *Mimesis 1*: "If, in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated."[17] It is in this sense telling how Fredric Jameson uses the same image – that of a literary *raw material* – to define, from a Marxist perspective, literary creation as the transformation of something that was already there waiting to be transformed.[18] The proximity between Bragança's struggle and other critiques of representation is obvious. Jameson's own *Marxism and Form*, for example, published in 1971, can only be fully understood as a coming to terms with contemporary theories of the text. However, rather than exploring the idea of Bragança's pen being a *textualization* of the wheel of the Volkswagen, what I think is interesting here is the way in which what articulates this figuration is political activism.[19] In Bragança, as in the other authors we have seen so far, is it political radicalism that leads to the radical questioning of artistic practice.

So, what is challenging in this relation is that the parallel between history and narrative is not enough, for the writing of the novel in *Directa*'s chapter 18 is itself evoked as part of the same story that narrates the return to Lisbon by car. The political nature of both acts is the only way we have to avoid falling into

[17] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 57.

[18] "For the essential characteristic of literary raw material or latent content is precisely that it never really is initially formless, never (…) initially contingent, but is rather already meaningful from the outset, being neither more nor less than the very components of our concrete social life itself: words, thoughts, objects, desires, people, places, activities. The work of art does not confer meaning on these elements, but rather transforms their initial meanings into some new and heightened construction of meaning (…)." Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 403.

[19] My point here is that the 'quasi-text' Paul Ricoeur identifies in all forms of action is particularly meaningful in moments as charged with historical intentionality as revolutions and political activism: "If we may nevertheless speak of action as a quasi-text, it is insofar as the symbols, understood as interpretants, provide the rules of meaning as a function of which this or that behavior can be interpreted", Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 58.

metaphorical circularity (*writing the wheel*, *driving the pen*). What the digressive conjectures in which the driver apparently loses himself show us is that thought and all the different narratives and cultural references of chapter 18 are material aspects of politics, and in the case of antifascism, tools as decisive as the Volkswagen that takes the comrade to the border.

Both the image of the pen as a weapon and of the steering wheel as a pen should thus be read beyond metaphor. The first reason for this is familiar enough: novels, films and historical narratives are aspects of politics, raising awareness and working in the intellectual struggles for hegemony. More decisively, however, the production and circulation of the ideas, images and narratives that fill these films and novels can also be seen as material aspects of political activism. More than instruments *for* political action, they are already *part of* the action. Conversely, the revolutionary political culture Nuno Bragança inserts himself seems in this sense to constitute an appropriate setting to overcome the separation between *practice* and *theory* (or *representation*).

2.2 From Literature to Activism

Bragança and Jameson thus seem to agree that revolutionary politics, as a radical questioning of history, must be simultaneously theoretical and practical. Or better still, that the elements traditionally associated with thought and representation – speech, images, narrative, etc. – may in specific circumstances go beyond an indirect role and take a substantial part in political action. The insistence on these same tropes in *Cravo* and *Directa* suggests that this idea was not strange to the radical political culture of 1970s Portugal. In fact, if we look at still another novel from the period, *Retrato dum Amigo Enquanto Falo* [Portrait of a Friend While I Speak], by Eduarda Dionísio (1978), we can confirm the extent to which books and discussions not only played a full part in resistance and Revolution, but also how they to a large extent turned the process of political radicalization and historical transformation into a set of intellectual, artistic and literary events.

Dionísio's novel can be read as a *Bildungsroman* of her generation. Its chronological frame and narrative structure thus coincides with *Directa*, as stories that started before 1974 and would only conclude afterwards. In fact, it is the Revolution that mediates the period's historical progression, as the outcome of those same episodes of antifascist resistance whose conclusion, after 1975, opened the way for the historical reflections that constitute the outcome of both narratives. But whereas Nuno Bragança goes to pains in order to prove that the second moment (that of writing a novel), is still part of the same historical process of the first, *Retrato dum Amigo Enquanto Falo* [henceforth *Retrato*] does not have to prove that literature is part of history because history itself, at least for the 1960s generation, was already narrated through the production and circulation of literary objects. Rather than more familiar forms of activism (confronting the police, fleeing the country, sabotaging State interests) politics in the novel take the form of "distributing pamphlets", "prepare notebooks", "cut, staple, typewrite, all those gestures (…) of reproducing ideas."[20]

One cannot say that the status of this activism is in any sense different from clandestinely taking a man to the border. These tasks too were clandestine and involved physical activities as risky and absorbing as driving the Volkswagen back to Lisbon (those pamphlets Dionísio refers to were considered subversive and chased by the authorities). By telling the political history of the revolution as a struggle of discourse and ideas[21], *Retrato* may be said to take a step further from *Directa*. We can see this in the way Eduarda Dionísio too uses the word "raw" – *em bruto* – to articulate the relation between history and its representation. However, whereas in *Directa* activism is a raw material that then has to be transformed into literature ("writing then in raw what I know drive"), in *Retrato* the relation becomes less mediated as writing encapsulates "the raw material of the period" (*a época em bruto*[22]). In these circumstances, all Dionísio has to do is to "re-enact in written form those recent times that I senselessly

[20] Dionísio, *Retrato dum Amigo enquanto Falo*, 35.
[21] In her analysis of *Retrato*, Ana Paula Ferreira focuses on the linguistic and political implications of the narrator's confessional, intimate, discourse, whereas my own reading keeps in line with the more public and collective aspects of that same discourse. Ferreira, "Reengendering History".
[22] Idem, 54.

rehashed"[23] for, as he have just seen, those recent times already were, to a large extent, filled with writing. In these circumstances, the political history stemming from the early 1960s to the post-revolutionary period can be narrated as the rise and fall of radical political discourse, here seen, then, as a metonymy of the rise and fall of the revolutionary process as a whole.[24]

Following the narrative of *Retrato*, one understands the extent to which the revolution is a consequence of this production and circulation of writings and ideas. On the other hand, the PREC is also shown as a period marked by the proliferation of discourses, when words fill the streets and the walls, when the "pleasure of oral text" was conquered and many people suddenly realized they could say things while participating in events, as doing and saying were both part of the same forms of activism. But just as the seeds of the revolution had already been in the words that were used as its raw material, it soon became clear, from within the revolutionary process, that the deterioration of speech and the emergence of new forms of silence would eventually lead to defeat:

> Have you noticed how writers stopped writing and painters stopped making paintings? Why is it that there is no art of these times in these times? Are we doomed to only speak and sing our defeats and miseries? (…) I never really understood what prevents militants from being good writers, or at least from writing books where they can offer an account of the pleasures of militancy or of those things that only they know and why it is always those that stay in their homes that are forced to conjure what they would never be able to live and to pretend to believe in what day after day they prove not to care about. Such a poor and insane division of labour.[25]

This 'division of labour' is exactly what *Retrato* refuses, when it ascribes a role to writing in the production of events. The novel ends with an epilogue where Dionísio takes us back to her generation's political *coming of age*. In the three final pages, titled "History", the narrator drops the intimate first person and

[23] Idem, 52.
[24] The exact same process can be seen in other historical episodes within the same revolutionary political culture: in his forward to the English edition of Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Jameson describes the struggle for communism – "the spirit of October 1917", according to Nuno Bragança – as an "eternity of debate and discord, the perpetual present of ideological passion and politicized consciousness". Jameson, Fredric, "A Monument to Radical Moments". In Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, XXVI.
[25] Idem, 83-85

creates, between her and the text, a distance proper to historians. That is the moment when we finally read about the start of that political history, following the personal story of the "friend" mentioned in the title, a small town young man arriving to Lisbon to University, where he will create a network of sociability and eventually become politicized. The episode ends like this:

> During those holidays, because things were hot in Lisbon and he now had a few friends, he would write and receive letters every day, letters in which news were told covertly and between the lines. (…)
> When the holidays were over, he left as usual. He took the rifle with him on the train, as a piece of himself. Father had given his consent, but mother asked, hesitantly and in a low voice: 'are you sure you'll need it, dear?'
> (…) Next day, in Lisbon, it rained for ever and ever. It was raining when he entered the shop where he sold the rifle. It was raining when he entered the pawn-shop where he bought the typewriter, a portable one, with the AZERT keyboard. It was raining at night when he started to write the bulletin on the stencil, while someone sitting on the edge of the tattered sofa dictated it to him with a clear voice. It was still raining when he finished: Lisbon, on such and such a day in such and such a month of 1962[26]

Writers, Dionísio argues, could also be activists because writing already was a decisive aspect of her generation's political identity. In this sense, *Retrato* can both be read as a political history of documents and discourse and a cultural history of activism. Documents mediated political radicalization. But this mediation involved a dialectical tension, for the reason why writing became so decisive was that ideas and narratives already permeated the political processes in which they participated. This was the tension experienced by the narrator of *Directa*'s chapter 18. And yet, these novels do not fully respond to the challenge posed by Maria Velho da Costa in *Cravo*: the Carnation Revolution was not only the outcome of written activism or a historical episode in the wider history of communism; it was also an explosion of speech, in which those previously silenced and, even more importantly, those who did not know how to write documents, suddenly started to speak.

2.3 Speech activism

[26] Idem, 123, 124.

The image of speech as a decisive aspect of political activism is very familiar to the historical context of the Carnation Revolution. From the anti-colonial movement to student rebellion around 1968, words in all its different forms (slogans, manifestos, books, murals, banners and spoken interventions in assemblies) were seen as decisive aspects of political activism.[27] To many, discourse as such was the true object of contention. Michel de Certeau, for example, historicized this, by comparing speech with the Bastille and presenting the former as what was at stake in 1968, thus signalling the emergence of a new political culture: 1960s rebels took the word in the same way the eighteenth-century French revolutionaries stormed the Bastille and the Bolsheviks took the Winter Palace in 1917.[28]

Certeau stressed that the right of everyone to affirm his or her own individual opinion constituted the most decisive instrument of political subjectivity. However, this raised a problem that has never ceased to traverse the debates about the 1960s: such individual right to speech, the equivalence between political subjectivity and individual utterance, ran the risk of excluding many political subjects.[29] In her account of the Italian 1968 generation, Luisa Passerini shows how central speech was in the constitution of new political subjectivities, for in speech converged both one's public opinion and personal idiosyncrasies.[30] But Passerini also shows how that same process gave way to a new type of "charismatic leader, sometimes defined as 'verbal leadership'".[31] Passerini emphasized in particular the pressure exerted by public performance on women, for the liberation of speech benefited those who already controlled a male-dominated public sphere.

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[27] On the circulation of ideas and their vehicles throughout different political struggles, cf. Horn, *The Spirit of '68*. Horn's periodization analyses the "sixties" as a political culture, rather than a mere chronological period, which allows him to include the case of the Carnation Revolution both politically and chronologically within the 'long 1960s', a concept first coined by Arthur Marwick. Cf. Marwick, *The Sixties*.

[28] "Last May speech was taken the way, in 1789, the Bastille was taken. (…) This right commanded, for example, the reactions of assemblies that were always prepared to defend it whenever it appeared to be threatened in the heat of debate: 'Everybody here has the right to speak.'" Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, 11.

[29] See, for instance, Kristin Ross's critique to a memory of 1968 focused on individuals rather than collective political subjectivities. Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives*.

[30] "In fact, a characteristic of the new language, for better or worse, seems to be no longer wanting to separate speech from behavior in the confirmation of its own experience and the coherence of its own ideals." Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 74.

[31] Idem, 83.

And yet, the ideological nature of these speeches (not to mention the academic context in which they often took place) suggests that the working class was also likely to remain marginalized. In a country like Portugal, where a quarter of the population was still illiterate at the time of the Revolution, this second form of marginalization was particularly dramatic. Interestingly, in *Cravo,* Maria Velho da Costa dedicates a large space both to the situation of women in Portuguese society and to the participation of the working-class in the PREC. However, despite her efforts to immerse herself in the political process, she always seems more at ease as the spokeswoman of the female condition than as the "voice of the people". This was the limit not only of *Cravo*, but indeed of all literature pretending to "give form" to the "country's spoken body", as Costa encouraged her peers at the Congress of Portuguese Writers.

Although the articulation of the "voice of the people" has always been a literary trope, the revolution represented a unique challenge to writers. The problem was that although the people did not write, the PREC was the moment when that same people suddenly started to speak. So, whereas the writer still appears in *Cravo* as a "carrier of rare words", the only one who seemed able to verbalize the situation, the new circumstances required an inversion of roles forcing writers to somehow learn how to be the "pupils[s] of the talking matter", that is, to learn from the grassroots movement where the working class started doing politics through speech. But as Costa also recognizes in *Cravo*, the discrepancy between the educated written language of writers and the oral speech of workers became immediately apparent. In short, despite all the formal efforts by Eduarda Dionísio, Nuno Bragança and Maria Velho da Costa, their books were still the expression of those whose work (political as it may have been) remained intrinsically literary and thus separated from the new discourses liberated in the PREC.

3 – What Shall I Do With This Sword?

The problem was of course not with these writers, but with the medium itself. Literature, suitable as it may have been to describe how important written documents were to the period's politics, just did not seem appropriate to contain the revolution's popular utterance. Film, on the other hand, very early proved to

be in an ideal position to record the voices of the people and thus tackle the dynamics of the event. In this sense, the large corpus of documentary cinema produced during the PREC by Portuguese and foreign filmmakers can be seen as a monumental survey of what men and women, peasants and factory workers had to say in all sorts of grassroots political activities: interviews, demonstrations, occupations, meetings, etc. Moreover, the indexical immediacy presented by film enhanced the complexity of speech, by adding a performative dimension normally absent in writing. All sorts of state of mind replace here the metaphors and the word play: people speaking in films are cheerful and angry, excited and thoughtful, and what they say can be judgemental, utopian or catastrophist. More than thoughts as such, they were able to articulate their own situation in processes of social transformation, which necessarily entailed some form of political analysis and historical narrative. Therefore, we will now go back to film analysis in order to better grasp, before concluding, the performance of speech as the raw material of the PREC.

One of the most self-reflective films made in the heat of the revolutionary process – as a film that simultaneously participates in, and detaches from, the event – was *Que Farei Com Esta Espada?* [What Shall I Do With This Sword?], by João César Monteiro (1975). The question in the title may be interpreted in different ways. The juxtaposition, through editing, of shots with a crusade holding a sword in Lisbon's castle in front of the Tagus River filled with North American aircraft carriers, suggests César Monteiro was questioning the chances of a socialist revolution in a poor country of the western world. The use of footage from Murnau's *Nosferatu* – the ship arriving and the rats spreading ashore – insists on the topic and creates a strong allegory with the presence of American marines in Lisbon's estuary - the plague coming to town – while it also seems to question the impact of cinema in dramatic political circumstances.

And yet, despite the many interpretations opened by historical allegory and film citation, I would like to suggest that the main question the film raises – what the *sword* in the title refers to – is of whether a revolution is possible in a country where the people have trouble articulating. In fact, several sequences in the film show people talking about politics. One the most interesting is of an old man from

a rural region, when he gives a speech in a ceremony celebrating liberation. The discourse goes on for no less than eight minutes and although the director juxtaposes other images, for most of the time the camera stands still, the shot covering the whole room where the ceremony takes place, reinforcing the sense of boredom experienced by the audience while he repeats the same ideas over and over again. Sometimes he tries to dramatize the discourse, shouting "long live communism" and punching the table in front of him, but what the scene reveals is an absolute lack of linguistic and performative skills to capture the audience and develop a coherent line of thought (Monteiro, 1975).

These scenes are not exactly ironic, and not all speeches in the film struggle in the same way. A prostitute, for example, recalls sordid experiences with clients. But what could be a discourse on sexual exploitation, gets stuck in comical obscenity. African students plan their future after decolonization. But their Portuguese is very poor, and they struggle with a coherent argumentation. César Monteiro's initial question, one could argue, is filled with anxiety. If speech was a decisive weapon of historical transformation, how could the Revolution succeed with such linguistic "swords"?

A final example may help us reach the core of the problem. The scene shows several workers with what seems to be a refinery in the background. Some of them comment on the economic situation and the threatening NATO manoeuvres in the Tagus that works as the film's narrative axis (thus the presence of American marines). Their account is schematic, reproducing the analyses of the Communist Party – hegemonic in that context – especially in the insistent parallel between working class consciousness and national identity. But this is exactly what makes the tropes they repeat such an interesting document of the political *doxa* in PREC's grassroots movements: the identification of class struggle with patriotism, or the refusal of both Portuguese colonialism in Africa and American imperialism, all their narratives show us how the discourses in circulation among the working class did not only reproduce doctrines with a certain degree of complexity, they also shared a set of political ideas and imaginary with workers from all over the world.

The coincidence of similar political references and analyses in other films can be read in two ways: as the representation of an unconscious repetition of ideas, as if these skilled manual workers with poor linguistic skills merely resonated the doctrines of their party and leaders (or what they read in newspapers and heard on television); or as their joint participation in a broader imaginary, a political culture going well-beyond the Portuguese revolution as such. Two other filmic examples may help us define this second hypothesis. The first is from *Torrebela*, by German director Thomas Harlan on the occupation of a large land-estate in 1975. The scene I am referring to, as the film itself, would become rather famous: two workers discuss the property of a spade, and while one insists that the tool is his, the other argues that it should belong to the cooperative where they both work. Both men's reasoning seems obvious. While the first raises the spectre of communism – "Tomorrow, you take my boots, they are taken by the cooperative and I'm left naked" (Harlan, 1978) – the second retorts with a utopia of plenty: "you won't be left naked, you'll have more clothes than you have now".[32] The fact that the exact same point of contention – and most of the arguments used – can also be found in the collectivization debate scene of Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*, a 1995 feature film on the Spanish Civil War, is very indicative. Here too, a small land-owner retorts with the same proviso – "to each his own" (Loach, 1995) – to the arguments in favour of collectivization by the other participants in the discussion.

The terms in these discussions are familiar enough. The moment when the evident grounds of private property are challenged by the no less evident reasoning of collectivization can be seen as the key requirement of any modern Revolution. At first sight, the concrete settings where these two scenes occur are very distant from each other, in the historical context (from the Portuguese PREC to the Spanish Civil War), in the filmic support of their narratives (from a German 1978 documentary film to a British fictional feature film twenty years later) and even in the ideological contexts of the collectivist side in both discussions (although the far-left cooperative in the Portuguese revolution shared some political positions with the anarchists in the Spanish Civil War – namely in its

[32] José Filipe Costa has analysed this scene in "When Cinema Forges the Event: the case of *Torrebela*".

resistance to Stalinism). And yet, the fact that both enact such similar situations suggests a political kinship between the two. In this sense, it can be said that despite all the historical and ideological distances one can establish between the contexts represented in both scenes, what is here most remarkable is the way they both seem to participate in a single history of modern revolution, in which the same struggle to topple capitalism and establish communism through collectivization traversed distant times and places. Our focus on the role of discourse and narrative in the Carnation Revolution thus seems to have taken us to a broader historical phenomenon – as we have also seen in Nuno Bragança's reference to a *spirit of 1917* – whose methodological implications we still need to grasp.

4 – Final Considerations: Towards a Cultural History of Communism

What linked these different historical situations were not only the specific political contexts that precipitated revolutionary breaks. As we saw throughout this article, those situations were already pervaded by the narratives and discourses that constitute the "eternity of debate and discord"[33] Fredric Jameson identified with the history of communism in his forward to Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetic of Resistance*. The novel itself is an interesting document of this political tradition, in which discursive forms are as a constitutive part of revolutionary politics as, for example, communist clandestinity in Nazi Germany or fighting on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. Not surprisingly, an important aspect in the novel's young protagonists political work was dedicated to the appropriation of the cultural patrimony of communism to contemporary political struggles:

> Meanwhile our attempts to escape speechlessness were among the functions of our lives, the things we thereby found were first articulations, they were basic patterns for overcoming muteness and measuring the steps into a cultural realm. Our idea of a culture rarely coincided with what constituted a gigantic reservoir of goods, of pent-up inventions and illuminations. As have-nots, we initially approached the accumulation with anxiety, with awe, until it dawned on us that we had to fill all these things with our own evaluations,

[33] Cf. note 24.

> that the overall concept might be useful only when expressing something about the conditions of our lives as well as about the difficulties and peculiarities of our thought processes.[34]

One could argue that the worker's struggles with discourse in *Que Farei com Esta Espada?* can be seen as examples of these "attempts to escape speechlessness", to overcome the "anxiety" caused by the "gigantic reservoir of [cultural] goods", and to "fill all these things with [their] own evaluations." What they all did, then, German communists in the late 1930s and Portuguese workers in 1975, was to refuse the symbolic distribution that declared they had no right to speak and make themselves *count* not only as political subjects but, even more decisively, political subjects capable of defining their own situation discursively.[35] As for their apparent inability to articulate correctly, that was in this case irrelevant because discourse was taken as forcefully as any other form of property. In these circumstances, its legitimacy depended more on *form* – the fact that, by seizing it, workers turned speech into a political act – than on content, in still another situation where the distinction between activism and the words that articulate it are blurred.[36]

Finally, this intersection of discourse and activism represents a challenge to cultural history. The revolutionary events here analysed were discursively dense not only because activists seized speech but also because by doing so they re-enacted gestures and words from a broader narrative of communism – a tradition that name a specific political culture in which gestures and words merge in activism. The challenge presented by César Monteiro's double use of the word *sword* – or by Nuno Bragança's correlation between wheel and pen – should be

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[34] Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, 45.

[35] "(…) there is the symbolic distribution of bodies that divides them into two categories: those that one sees and those that one does not see, those who have a logos – memorial speech, an account to be kept up – and those who have no logos, those who really speak and those whose voice merely mimics the articulate voice to express pleasure and pain. Politics exists because the logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt." Rancière, idem, 22.

[36] This indistinction is already present in Alain Badiou's definition of politics as a form of *thought*: 'Politics is a thought. This statement excludes all recourse to the theory/practice pairing. There is certainly a 'doing' of politics, but it is immediately the pure and simple experience of a thought, its localisation. Doing politics cannot be distinguished from thinking politics.' Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 46.

read beyond metaphor in this exact sense: a cultural history of communism as these authors and activists understood it, has to be able to overcome the distinction between theory and practice, or practices and representations, and intersect both poles in order to coincide with a political history of discursive objects.

Before concluding, I would like to return one last time to the Carnation Revolution. This time, not to analyse another narrative trying to come to terms with history, but to see how the Revolution seems to have been anticipated by a film, and in the exact same terms we have been dwelling on narratives in this article. The film is Alberto Seixas Santos' *Brandos Costumes* (1974)[37], an allegory of dictatorial Portuguese society through the depiction of a standard family composed of an authoritarian father, a prudish mother, and two daughters, one submissive, the other rebellious. The film ends with still another scene of someone seizing political subjectivity through discourse. The father (the dictator) has just died and the rebellious daughter decides to take the narratives – filmic and historical – in her own hands. She sits on a table and starts reading the first paragraph of the section "Bourgeois and Proletarians" from Marx's and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*. However, we know since the beginning of the film that the cause of her submission was the inability to speak, the trouble to find the right words. Rather than reading the manifesto, she stutters the initial sentences, as if learning how to read by practising: "The his… to… ry of all hith… er… to ex… is… ting so… cie… ty is the his… to… ry of class stru… ggles." (Seixas Santos, 1974) As she keeps repeating, the text gradually becomes coherent. After a while, other voices overlap, insistently repeating the same sentence. Finally, her education is over: she closes the book, raises her head and facing the camera states that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" in only one

[37] We already came across Seixas Santos when we analysed *Gestos & Fragmentos* (1983). On the historical relation between the two films and the Carnation Revolution, cf. Trindade "Thinking the Revolution in Alberto Seixas Santos's *Brandos Costumes* and *Gestos & Fragmentos"*. The position of these and some of the other films discussed in this article within the history of Portuguese cinema is discussed in Areal, *Um País Imaginado*.

go, as if the words were hers. On the street, one can hear soldiers marching, in what sounds the anticipation of the 25 April 1974.[38]

By allowing his character to determine the closure of the narrative, Seixas Santos basically enacts the same self-reflexive gesture we already saw at work in the narratives of *Bom Povo Português*, *Directa* and the other works, both filmic and literary, I have analysed.[39] But what is remarkable about this filmic revolution shot only a few months before the coup is its historicity proper, for although this is "only" a fictional scene, the coincidence it establishes between reading a text and the political event is not, as I have been arguing, so far-fetched as one would initially assume. If discourse can really be seen as an aspect of the world, *Brandos Costume*'s final scene may have reached a "representational truth", which, according to Frank Ankersmit, is the moment when narratives succeed "in bridging the gap between language and reality (…) by linking the textual level of historical representation and its presented."[40]

By *presenting* one of the most decisive *aspects* of the Carnation Revolution's historical context – ideological radicalization – the girl in the film too seems to bridge the gap between a speech act and a political act. Conversely, analysing this particular scene from the perspective of Cultural History may become a good opportunity to cross that same divide between political practices and cultural representations, and treat the latter as constitutive aspects of the former. In these circumstances, discourse literally becomes a political event.

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[38] This fictional anticipation is strictly political. As António Pedro Pita argued in relation to the Carnation Revolution as a whole, revolutions bring the future to the present, i.e., they work as the fulfillment of a utopian imaginary already at work before the event. Cf. António Pedro Pita, "O Dia *Inicial*: 25 de Abril ou *O Imaginário da Revolução*" (paper presented at the III Colóquio História e Arte, Florianópolis, 2010).

[39] It is important to stress that, despite the specific relevance of filmic sources in the retrieval of grassroot's discourses in the PREC, the impact of political events in narratives as such (which constitutes this article's key methodological move) can be verified in filmic and literary narratives alike.

[40] '*I propose to define representational truth as what the world, or its objects, reveal to us in terms of its aspects*. (…) representational truth succeeds in bridging the gap between language and reality. It does so by linking the textual level of historical representation and its presented – which is, as we have found, not a conceptual entity like a word's meaning, but an aspect of the world itself.' Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth and Reference in Historical Representation*, 2012.

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